



FRED CLARK

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE ♦ 42ND ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Public Hearing

Committee on Education

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

10:00 am, Rm. 417N (GAR Hall)

Testimony – AB 805

Efficiency and Consolidation Feasibility Studies Grants

Thank you Chair Pope-Roberts and members of the committee. I testify today in favor of AB-805, relating to efficiency and feasibility study grants for school districts undergoing consolidations.

None of us wants to see schools consolidated, however the current fiscal environment for schools today makes it clear that schools are facing financial crises that will result in more consolidations in the years to come. By restoring funding for the school consolidation feasibility study grant program, this legislation helps provide tools for school districts so they can most effectively plan for the many details associated with consolidation.

Districts undergoing consolidation are faced with a myriad of information, decisions, and strong differences of opinion within their communities. Working through these complex variables without assistance can be challenging for a volunteer school board. School districts need the equivalent of a business plan to effectively prepare for consolidation. Especially for small schools, these plans are often prepared by third parties.

In the 2007-2009 biennium, DPI awarded 11 grants totaling \$110,000 to fund consolidation feasibility studies for pairs or trios of school districts seeking consolidation. AB 805 provides \$50,000 for a one-time allocation to fund that program using the existing guidance.

I want to be clear, it is not our intent to point all arrows at consolidation as the only relief available to struggling schools. So, in addition to consolidation studies, this legislation adds funding for a new component designed to assist schools that want to study measures for improving efficiency. School district efficiency feasibility studies will help provide tools to districts who wish to reduce costs and improve their financial viability by combining operations, without sacrificing educational outcomes.

The bill appropriates \$150,000 for both consolidation feasibility and efficiency studies. Efficiency studies would be subject to a 20% district match. The appropriation will come from unused funds within the transportation categorical aid. Grants are for up to \$10,000 per school district.

Again, it is our hope with this legislation to provide a few new tools for schools while they face unique challenges. I ask for your support for this legislation.

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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

WAES Responds to Rural Caucus Proposal

“Ideas from Rural Caucus are Band-Aids. Our schools need a transfusion.”

I want to thank Chairperson Pope-Roberts and the members of the Assembly Education Committee for the opportunity to say a few words about what is known as the Rural Caucus’ Education Reform package.

Members of the legislative Rural Caucus should be commended for their willingness to address the finance crisis facing all of Wisconsin’s schools, including those in rural areas.

Their package of ideas addresses very real problems. For 15 years, schools and children have been subjected to an unsustainable school funding formula and now they are actually facing drastic cuts in state funding. As a result of this crisis, many schools are cutting personnel, services, and programs, others are fighting just to keep their doors open, and property taxpayers are being overburdened.

So while I applaud the Rural Caucus for their efforts, their proposal falls far short of what our children, schools, and communities need. The ideas forwarded by the Rural Caucus are Band-Aids and Band-Aids won’t stop this kind of bleeding.

What we urgently need is bold thinking and immediate, significant financial help -- a transfusion, not Band-Aids -- as well as a long-term solution to the school-funding crisis.

It is for this reason that the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools has launched “A Penny for Kids,” a program that has the support of thousands of voters. It proposes a one-penny increase in the sales tax in order to meet, head-on, the revenue shortfall. This transfusion of revenue will buy us the time we need to address the structural failures of our current funding formula.

I appreciate the Rural Caucus’s willingness to take on this issue, but their solution falls far short of the urgent and significant reform that must begin now.

WAES Members

School districts

Shell Lake Schools
Stevens Point Area School District
Platteville School District
Benton School District
Birchwood School District
Wabeno Area School District
Superior School District
Cuba City School District
Pepin School District
Barron Area School District
White Lake School District
Hurley School District
Sturgeon Bay School District
Laona School District
Washington School District
School District of Port Edwards
Southwestern School District
Rhineland School District
Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District
Elcho School District
Westfield School District
Goodman-Armstrong Creek
Madison Metropolitan School District
Menomonie Area School District
Phillips School District
Reedsville School District
School District of Phelps
North Lakeland School District
Crandon School District
School District of Athens
School District of Cadott
Milwaukee Public Schools
Minocqua J1 School District
Randall Consolidated School
Cumberland School District
Washburn School District
Evansville Community School District
New Auburn School District
Stoughton Area School District
Chequamegon School District (consolidated
from Park Falls and Glidden)
Pecatonica Area School District
Florence County School District
School District of Greenfield
Mineral Point School District

Teachers' associations

WEAC-Fox Valley Uniserv
Madison Teachers Inc.
Capital Area Uniserv-North
Green Bay Education Association
Southern Lakes United Educators
AFT-Wisconsin
Northern Tier Uniserv
Cedar Lake United Educators
WEAC Council No. 10
Kenosha Education Association
Lakewood Uniserv Council
Milwaukee Teacher's Education Association
Racine Educational Assistants Association
Racine Education Association
South West Education Association
Bayland Educators UniServ
West Central Education Association
Rock Valley Education Professionals
WEAC
West Suburban Council
Three Rivers United Educators
TriWauk Uniserv

Others

Institute for Wisconsin's Future
Dane County SOS Senior Council
Wisconsin Organization for Asian Americans
Japanese American Citizen League-Wisconsin
WISDOM
RVReferendum.org
Disability Rights Wisconsin
Project ABC (Waukesha)
Community and Schools Together (CAST)
abcmadison
League of Women Voter of Wisconsin
Education Fund
GrassRoots of Waukesha County
Wisconsin Association of School Councils
Price County Citizens Who CARE
Hartford AAUW
Paris YES Committee
Wisconsin Association for Talented and Gifted
Wisconsin Association of School Nurses

WAES Members

At-large

Ruth Sproull
John Simonson
Virginia Wyss
John Smart
Winnie Doxsie
John LaCourt
Ellen Lindgren
Beth Moss
Pat Kerhin
Trish O'Neil
Gayle Gonsior
Janet Kane
Erin Green
John Eyster
Carol Carstensen
Sally Overholt
Kathy Zingsheim
Marjorie Passman
Donna Tarpinian
Charles Fitzgerald
Jill Ellinwood
Connie Molbeck

James Arrowood
Bruce and Kathy MacIntyre
Andy Scott
David Tojek
Mary Bartkowiak
Paul Kusuda
Victoria Strattner
Doug Lueck
Carol and Jeff Krogmann
Lisa Anderson
Bev Bradford
Sara Companik
Cindy Weborg
Glorie Salas
Ken and Kimberly Bates
Barbara J. Blackmore
Jill Gaskell
Roxanne Starks
Joel Green
Lukas Diaz
Susan Hauri
Karen and Tom Tuten
Donelle Johnson

Parent organizations

Pecatonica PTA
Wisconsin PTA
Riverside University High School PTSA (MPS)
James Madison PTA (Appleton)
West Allis-West Milwaukee PTA Council
Neshkoro School Visioning Committee
Neshkoro (Westfield School District) PTO
Milwaukee City Council PTA/PTSA
Four Corners School PTA (Superior)

Professional groups

Fond du Lac Retired Educators Association
Wisconsin Retired Educators Association
Wisconsin School Social Workers Association
Madison Area Retired Educators Association
Rock Valley Education Professionals-Retired
Southern Lakes United Educators Board
Milwaukee Area Retired Teachers Association
Richland Area Retired Educators Association
Racine Area Retired Educators Association
Dunn County Retired Educators Association



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March 9, 2010

Thank you for holding this hearing today so that for the third year in a row, we can come to the Capitol and tell the Assembly Committee on Education just how desperately schools need a better funding system.

I appreciate that you have tried to do something to help schools, but your efforts could be called mis-directed. This is not meant as an insult, but it is a fact. For example:

- AB-805 provides more money for consolidation studies, even though the money allocated for consolidation studies is not getting used.
- AB-806 speeds up the schedule for schools to consolidate. Only one set of districts in the state has consolidated recently and people from there readily admit that it is a short-term solution. Consolidation is very distasteful.
- AB-807 might be useful. Maybe. Is there ever money left over in the DPI transportation fund to give out more money?
- AB-808 might be helpful. However, it starts us down the slippery slope. If 18 students is acceptable for a small class, why not 21. It's only 3 more kids.
- AB-809 will be helpful for MPS, but there are not many private schools in rural areas.

You as a committee have heard over and over the cries of parents, teachers, administrators, even students whose education is suffering because of missing courses, supplies, and opportunities. These students don't even know many of the things that their education is lacking until they become adults who did not have the life-skills classes in high school.

You know what needs to be done. You know, and many of you have said, that the school funding system is broken. Revenue caps are choking our children's education. When revenue caps were imposed, Wisconsin was 9th in the nation for per pupil spending, now we are 19th.

We need more money in the system. A one percent increase in the sales tax for education funding has been proposed and has much support. So why hasn't that been introduced?

You are the people who have the power to change this system and rescue the next generation of students from a mediocre education. We are pleading with you to be courageous and do the right thing. Or give the office up to someone who will.

Jill Gaskell
Wisconsin PTA
State Legislative Chair